

# Black Canyon Corridor

## Travel Management Plan and Environmental Assessment

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2017-0013-EA

October 2021



## **Background**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Hassayampa Field Office has prepared a travel management plan/environmental assessment (TMP/EA) that proposes to establish a travel route network and transportation system for the Black Canyon Corridor Travel Management Area (Project Area). The TMP/EA is a combined document that satisfies the requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act in assessing the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects from the designation of travel routes within the Project Area as “open,” “limited” or “closed.” The BLM has assessed the impacts to biological, cultural and socioeconomic resources within the approximately 166,165-acre Project Area, located in Yavapai and Maricopa counties, Arizona.

This TMP/EA is the first implementation-level document tiered to the Bradshaw-Harquahala Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP), which designated on BLM-administered lands in the Project Area as “open,” “limited” or “closed.” The approved TMP/EA would not: authorize the construction of new routes, nor would the approved TMP/EA authorize the physical rehabilitation/reclamation of closed routes. Those activities would be subjected to separate/future environmental analysis.

## **Determination**

On the basis of the information contained in the *Black Canyon Corridor Travel Management Plan and Environmental Assessment Final Environmental Assessment* (EA) (DOI-BLM-AZ-P010-2017-0013-EA), I have determined that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be required.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the *context* and *intensity* of the impacts described in the Final TMP/EA, which is hereby incorporated by reference.<sup>1</sup>

## **Context**

The Project Area is within the larger Bradshaw-Harquahala Planning Area (Map 2 of the Final TMP/EA). The Project Area spans north from State Highway 74/Carefree Highway to Dewey-Humboldt and the Prescott National Forest. Much of the Project Area is between the Bradshaw Mountains to the west and the Black Hills to the east. Large amounts of Prescott National Forest land border the Project Area to the west and northeast while BLM-administered land in the Agua Fria National Monument borders the Project Area’s east-central boundaries. (Map 1 of the Final EA/TMP).

In 2010 the BLM approved the RMP. At that time, the BLM limited travel to existing routes on BLM-administered lands in the Project Area. No areas were designated as “open” where cross-country or off-road vehicle travel would be permitted. This TMP/EA is the first implementation-level document tiered to the RMP and sets route designations as “open,” “limited” or “closed.”

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<sup>1</sup> This Finding of No Significant Impact and accompanying Final Environmental Assessment complies with the 1978 Council on Environmental Quality NEPA Implementing Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508). The 10 “intensity” questions that follow are consistent with the 1978 regulations.

In order to do this, the BLM completed route inventories in 2017, and route evaluations were completed by a BLM interdisciplinary team and Cooperating Agencies during the fall of 2017. Alternative C, which is the BLM's Proposed Action, recommends keeping open to all uses approximately 211 miles of travel routes (43 percent); in addition approximately 192 miles (38 percent) are open but limited to non-motorized use (84 miles), or vehicle type (45 miles), or certain authorized uses (49 miles) or Technical Vehicle Sites (14 miles); routes that were evaluated but either did not exist or were not recommended for construction approximately 43 miles (8 percent), and closing approximately 53 miles of travel routes (10 percent).

## **Intensity**

### *1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The designation of a travel route network would continue to provide motorized access on open routes for recreational purposes such as hunting, hiking, and sightseeing. Open and limited routes would also continue to provide access for authorized mineral material sales sites, rights-of-ways for utility lines, communication sites, and connectivity to privately-owned and other lands. The overall number of miles of travel routes would decrease; overall density of travel routes and fragmentation of wildlife habitat would decrease. Where there are a high number of closed routes, particulates (fugitive dust) would be expected to locally decrease, however where intensification of use occurs on remaining open primary routes, there would be an increase in particulates. Similarly, where there are a large number of closed routes, vehicle-caused mortality to wildlife would be expected to decrease. Closed routes over time would encourage natural revegetation, increasing the connectivity of vegetation communities. Where there are a high number of closed routes, noise-caused displacement of wildlife would decrease. At the same time, along those primary travel routes remaining open, there would likely be greater noise-caused displacement of wildlife. A decrease in routes open would likely decrease incidents of resource-damaging activities, such as target shooting and vandalism to cultural sites. Where routes are closed, there would be less potential for the spread of invasive plant species and noxious weeds.

### *2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The designation of a travel network would establish routes that are limited to certain uses, such as to non-motorized pedestrian or equestrian travel. The separation of these non-motorized uses from areas of motorized traffic would be expected to decrease potential conflicts between these use types, thereby improving public safety.

### *3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

There are no park lands, prime farmlands, delineated wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers within the Project Area on BLM-administered lands. There are special designations including an area of critical environmental concern and managed lands with wilderness characteristics within the Project Area. Historic and cultural sites also occur on BLM-administered lands within the Project Area. These unique characteristics were considered by the BLM's interdisciplinary team during route evaluations conducted in 2017.

### *4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The direct, indirect and cumulative effects from the designation of travel routes as “open,” “limited,” or “closed” are not considered highly controversial.

*5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects are not highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

*6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

Future actions such construction of new travel routes authorized in by this TMP/EA, would be subject to separate environmental analysis.

*7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The BLM has not identified any significant cumulative impacts caused by the designation of travel routes as “open,” “limited,” or “closed” on BLM-administered lands.

*8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss of destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

Only a small portion of the BLM-administered lands have been subject to intensive surveys for cultural sites eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This TMP/EA authorizes the designation of travel routes on BLM-administered lands as “open,” “limited,” or “closed.” No new route construction, and no physical rehabilitation/reclamation of travel routes would be authorized. On August 7, 2018, the BLM initiated consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the results of a Class I inventory, predictive modeling, and target Class III reconnaissance survey. The SHPO concurred with the findings of letter on September 6, 2018.

Implementation of route designations would occur over several years. Since this is a phased project, the BLM has executed a Programmatic Agreement in order to fulfill its obligation under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section V, Identification of Historic Properties, establishes the process by which the BLM would follow during subsequent implementation in order to avoid adverse effects to historic properties.

*9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

The Project Area includes habitat for the western yellow-billed cuckoo and northern Mexican gartersnake. Critical habitat for the western yellow-billed cuckoo also occurs in the Project Area (Map 4). The BLM determined that the designation of travel routes on BLM-administered lands, would result in “may effect, not likely to adversely affect” the western yellow-billed cuckoo (including critical habitat) and the northern Mexican gartersnake. This level of effect on these two species is discountable and insignificant. On October 1, 2018 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concurred in the BLM’s determination of effects. In April 2021 the USFWS finalized

critical habitat for the western yellow-billed cuckoo. Because the critical habitat was consulted on as "proposed" in 2018, no re-consultation with USFWS for the final critical habitat was required.

On August 3, 2020, an Agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Wild Earth Guardians, et al., was entered into in the U.S. District Court for Arizona. The USFWS agreed to return the Sonoran desert tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*) to the candidate list for potential Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection. Within 18-months the USFWS will publish in the Federal Register a new 12-month finding for the Sonoran desert tortoise, in accordance with the ESA.

At the time of the publication of the "draft" EA in 2018, the Sonoran desert tortoise was on the BLM Sensitive Species list. The BLM Special Status Species Management Manual 6840, on page .IF12f at j, states, "It is not necessary to consult or confer on candidate or Bureau sensitive species." The manual further states on page Glossary 1, "Candidate species and their habitats are managed as Bureau sensitive species." While the species has been returned to the Candidate list, consultation with USFWS was not required. The BLM had considered the Sonoran desert tortoise and affects on it in Section 3.7 on pages 29-34 of the Final TMP/EA.

*10) Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The designation of travel routes would not threaten to violate federal, State or local laws imposed to protect the environment.

  
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10/21/2021  
Date